

## **Significant Changes To The Elk Plan**

The final decision will be signed by the FWP Director.

1. **Establish a July 15 deadline for submission of proposed changes to the Elk Plan. Internally reviewed and approved changes would be brought forward through the tentative season-setting process in December and, with FWP Commission approval, would move forward through the public comment process for final adoption by the FWP Commission at the February Commission meeting.**
2. There were some comments relative to population objectives in individual hunting districts or Elk Management Units (EMU's). While some were suggestions for minor changes, several EMU's had more significant concerns relative to these objectives.
  - a. **Increase the Gravelly EMU elk objective from 6500 to 7000. Additionally, we recommend reducing the population management trigger from  $\pm 20\%$  of the population objective to  $\pm 15\%$  of the population objective, given the large elk population in this complex.**
  - b. **In a portion of HD 520 that is located south and east of the West Fork of Rock Creek (which is included in the Absaroka EMU), eliminate the Standard Package - Antlered Bull Regulation, and retain the permit-only season for bulls.**
3. **In the Gallatin/Madison EMU, the proposal is to eliminate the establishment of a limited permit-only hunt in the Gallatin Closed Area for the 2005 season (a local working group will be meeting with the Dept. and will be discussing possible options for the Gallatin Closed Area).**
4. In the Northern Yellowstone EMU (which includes the Gardiner Late Hunt), the following are proposed changes to the various regulation packages that were included in the Draft Elk Plan.

**For the Northern Yellowstone EMU, the restrictive regulation package would apply IF:**

  - a. **There are less than 3000 elk north of YNP; OR**
  - b. **Aerial surveys indicate there are less than 2000 elk north of Dome Mtn.; OR**
  - c. **Elk recruitment for the Northern Yellowstone elk population is less than 20 calves/100 cows for 2 consecutive years.**
  - d. **In the restrictive regulation package, there will be 500 or fewer antlerless elk permits offered for the Gardner Late Hunt.**

**The standard antlerless regulation package would apply IF:  
ANTLERLESS PACKAGE:**

- a. Aerial surveys indicate that there are 3000-5000 elk wintering north of YNP; OR
- b. Aerial surveys indicate a wintering population of 2000-3000 elk wintering north of Dome Mtn.; AND
- c. Elk calf recruitment for the Northern Yellowstone elk population is greater than 20 calves/100 cows.
- d. In the standard regulation package, there will be between 1000 and 1200 antlerless elk permits offered for the Gardner Late Hunt.

The standard antlered bull regulation package would apply IF:

**ANTLERED PACKAGE:**

- a. Change the bull objective from 25 bulls/100 cows to 10 bulls/100 cows
- b. Delete the standard bull regulation recommendation. Also, delete the references to the overall population size;

The liberal regulation package would be recommended IF:

- a. Aerial surveys indicate that there are more than 5000 elk wintering north of YNP.
- b. Aerial surveys indicate that there are more than 3000 elk wintering north of Dome Mtn. for 2 consecutive years; AND
- c. Elk calf recruitment for the northern Yellowstone elk population is greater than 20 calves/100 cows.
- d. If a or b and c (above) are met, then at least 2500 antlerless permits would be issued for the Gardiner Late Hunt.

**HD 316: Both the standard and the restrictive bull regulation are proposed to be lowered from 25 bulls/100 cows to 10 bulls/100 cows. Additionally, it is proposed to remove the reference here to the population objective.**

- 5. **Informational:** We received a number of comments relative to elk habitat considerations. Public comment on this issue was variable, with some commenting that they felt we needed to be more specific with additional habitat recommendations in some EMU's. Others commented that we were too specific, and that we should focus on elk management, and let the various land management agencies manage the habitat. Habitat recommendations for various EMU's were reviewed for consistency, and changed accordingly. The identification of important elk habitats will remain an important component of the Elk Plan, but some specific references in some EMU's that dictated specific prescriptions were eliminated.
- 6. **Informational:** We received a number of comments relative to wolves, and their effects on elk. Wolves are currently managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service under the authority of the Endangered Species Act. Therefore, the concerns expressed in these comments are beyond the scope of the Elk Plan at the present time. However, as discussed in the Elk Plan EA, upon delisting, the State of

Montana, through MFWP, would manage wolves according to the Montana Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. Under this plan, “FWP would manage gray wolves and ungulates in an integrated ecological manner and within the context of other environmental factors. If a local prey population was significantly impacted by wolf predation in conjunction with other environmental factors, FWP could consider reducing wolf pack size. If there were fewer than 15 breeding pairs (in Montana), relocation would be considered. If there were more than 15 breeding pairs, FWP could reduce pack size through liberal management tools, which could include regulated hunting or trapping.”

7. Include the adoption of the season extension ARM into the final Elk Plan.
8. Create new HD 309 called the Gallatin Valley Special weapons restriction area.

### **Proposed By FWP But Was Not Passed By FWP Commission**

9. **Informational:** There were numerous comments on both sides of the issue of establishing limited archery permits for the restrictive antlered regulation in some HDs in the region 4 & 6 portions of the Missouri River Breaks EMU (including HDs 410, 417, 620, 621 & 622 - the restrictive archery trigger applies when 50% or more of the bull harvest occurs during the archery season). One petition from the Glasgow area supported the implementation of limited archery permits. Conversely, a number of comments reflected the opposite view, and recommended staying with the existing archery season structure.

**Proposal: When 50% or more of the bull harvest occurs during the archery season in any one of the following HDs 410, 417, 620, 621, & 622, then all of these 5 HDs will change to limited archery permits, first choice only. Further, the restrictive bull regulation would include HDs 700 & 701, which would also change to limited archery permits if and when the archery bull harvest was 50% or higher (compared to the rifle harvest).**